



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Selawik National Wildlife Refuge

*A Special Place in Alaska!*

- Selawik National Wildlife Refuge was established to conserve the Western Arctic Caribou Herd, waterfowl, shorebirds and other migratory birds, salmon, and sheefish.
- The refuge, which straddles the Arctic Circle, encompasses an area approximately the size of Connecticut.
- The refuge is named from the Inupiat word “siilivik,” which means “place of (vik) sheefish (sii).” Sheefish, which can weigh up to 50 pounds, are large predatory whitefish found only in the vast arctic and subarctic drainages of Siberia and North America.
- The 240,000 acre Selawik Wilderness area in the Waring Mountains contains vegetated sand dunes that have persisted since the Pleistocene Era.

- Tundra wetlands and more than 24,000 lakes dominate the refuge landscape, and are among the last stopping areas for hundreds of thousands of shorebirds and waterfowl awaiting spring breakup in the arctic.



*The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service manages 16 national wildlife refuges in Alaska, or nearly 82% of the National Wildlife Refuge System acreage.*

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Leslie Kerr/USFWS

*Caribou crossing the Selawik River.*

- The refuge is located near the Bering Land Bridge that once existed between Asia and North America. Many thousands of years ago, animals and humans migrated across this strip of land connecting the two continents.
- The Western Arctic Caribou Herd, the largest in Alaska, migrates through the refuge twice a year.
- Selawik's lowlands and river deltas host a fall migration of more than 100,000 waterfowl.
- For thousand of years, the Inupiat people have hunted, fished and gathered berries on and around the Selawik Refuge. These traditional activities continue to this day.
- The refuge provides pristine habitat for more than 180 bird species. At least 10 of these are year-round residents, enduring winter temperatures as low as minus 60 degrees F and strong winter winds.
- Hot springs flow from the ground at two locations near the headwaters of the Selawik River. Use of the hot springs dates back to historic periods when the Selawik headwaters and other nearby passes were trade and communication routes between Eskimo and Indian societies in the northwest region of Alaska.
- The upper 160-mile reach of the Selawik River is a congressionally designated Wild River.
- Several bird species from Eurasia migrate to, and breed on, the Selawik Refuge, presenting unique opportunities to view birds that do not migrate through any of the four North American flyways.
- The refuge is open to hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, photography, boating, camping, and other recreational activities.